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ABSTRACT

Educators of graduate students of English who are simultaneously teaching undergraduate composition courses should focus on how the study of institutional history might shed light on contemporary praxis. The Cultural and Critical Studies Ph.D. Program in the University of Pittsburgh (Pennsylvania) English Department combines an innovative approach to theoretically aware and historically based advanced work in English Studies with a comprehensive teacher-training program. Seminar work connects teaching and theory, disciplinary history and current practices, cultural studies and composition. Within a cultural studies context, the required two-semester teaching seminars taken by all first-time composition teachers are designed to help them compose their stances as teachers. These seminars focus on intensive reading of, followed by written assignments about, important historical texts concerning the "social mission" of English teachers. Students must reflect on their pedagogical goals, assignments, and philosophies of education. Extensive quotes from three papers by different students show that a range of positions results from these assignments. These texts represent teachers in the process of constructing and revising self-conscious positions about teaching composition within the structures of the contemporary department and university, as well as reflect diverse readings of institutional history. A shift in the paradigm of graduate training, as exemplified by the University of Pittsburgh's program, constitutes an important and progressive aspect of a cultural studies curriculum in English graduate education. (HB)

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"Institutional and Disciplinary History in a Cultural Studies Curriculum"

Philip E. Smith II

When I began as a new Teaching Assistant with my first section of composition in 1966 at Northwestern University, I was simply handed a textbook and informed by the department secretary about the date of the departmental final examination. There were no meetings of staff, no teaching seminars, no sharing of goals or methods other than spontaneous discussions in the halls and a couple of meetings arranged informally and sparsely attended by Teaching Assistants. I blundered through my first class by imitating (or defying, sometimes) what had transpired in my own freshman English education a few years earlier. Since that experience, one of the strongest motives in my "social mission" as a teacher has been to make help a place for pedagogy in English graduate education; in particular I've been interested in what teachers have to learn from seminar work that has them reading and discussing institutional histories while teaching in the context Jean Ferguson Carr talked about on this panel today.

The Cultural and Critical Studies Ph.D. Program in the University of Pittsburgh English Department combines an innovative and ground-breaking approach to theoretically aware and historically based advanced work in English Studies with a comprehensive teacher-training program for all M.A., M.F.A., and Ph.D. students on support. Our teacher-training emphasizes the historical and academic study of pedagogy in seminars and also provides significant support through mentoring, staff meetings, and in-class observations for new teachers who are developing their classroom practices. I'll introduce some of this seminar work that connects teaching and theory, disciplinary history and current practices, cultural studies and

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composition, historical research and self-reflexivity. However, I'd also like you to hear a selection of voices from those who are doing the work in this semester's seminar.

First, some departmental history and programmatic background: for about ten years in the Pitt English department we have defined and steadily revised a cultural-studies curriculum that extends in various ways from undergraduate introductory courses in composition and literature to advanced graduate seminars, to intensive study for project work, and to dissertations. We think it accords serious recognition to pedagogy, literary theory, and theoretically informed, historical study of literary, visual, and critical texts. We understand cultural studies as offering, among other things, a way to enhance the integration of programs and areas of study--of composition with literature and film, graduate study with undergraduate teaching--and also as a way of blurring the lines and features of previous models of disciplinary study within programs. Over the course of these curricular revisions, we've found ourselves doing more reading in composition courses, more writing in literature courses, more theory in literature and composition courses, more teaching of both kinds of courses by faculty and graduates from literature, film, composition, and creative writing programs.

There are important traces of our curricular discussions in my colleagues' publications over the last decade on pedagogy, composition, and cultural studies, some of which anticipated and most of which were generated by this ferment. They are traces of the ways that our curriculum change benefited from and contributed to debates within the profession of English studies over methodological and theoretical questions. Jean Ferguson Carr, for example, describes cultural studies in terms of the disciplinary shift that has informed our curricular changes:

> Cultural studies is not a single position or set of behaviors, but rather a cluster of interests that comes from theory, from teaching, and from social concerns. The shift from literary to cultural studies marks a change that draws on work in many different areas of the humanities--feminist criticism, minority studies, composition and pedagogy, the history of the book, textual editing, reception

> theory, popular culture and media, literacy and instruction. The shift emphasizes the changed understanding of "literature" and its relationship to society. Cultural studies moves away from "history of ideas" to a contested history of struggles for power and authority, to complicated relations between "center" and "margin," between dominant and minority relations. (25)

Within this cultural-studies context, our required two-semester teaching seminars taken by all first-time Teaching Assistants and Teaching Fellows are designed to help them compose their stances as teachers. In the first semester, we ask them to study their own positions and practices as teachers of composition both within our institution and also in the larger field of the discipline. I am one of two teachers for the second semester course, entitled Seminar in Teaching English, which asks them to look backwards at disciplinary and institutional histories that might complicate the contested discourses of English studies they find themselves speaking to themselves and their students. We focus on the aims and ideologies of cultural education at several moments in the history of the discipline in Britain and the USA. As new teachers, graduate students are likely to find themselves in their own classrooms representing already inscribed texts, assignments, requirements, and curricula in addition to their own teaching agendas. We ask these new teachers to broaden the historical and institutional contexts in which they understand their teaching and to situate themselves in relation to the formation of the discipline, the reasons for English departments, and the development within institutions of programs of study, subdisciplinary specialties, and institutional compromises--the conflicts, traditions, and innovations that have shaped the study and teaching done in English departments generally and in our department in particular.

To sketch in briefly the range of institutional and disciplinary histories we discuss in the seminar, I'll quote our course description:

> One way of viewing the day-to-day workings of this seminar will be as a continual juxtaposing and contrasting of two sets of texts. The first set consists of readings that we have chosen as instances of familiar and, at least in part, com-

> pelling ways of imagining and working on problems central to teaching and English studies. This semester these texts, supplemented by photocopied materials, will be (in the order we plan to take them up):
>
> - Matthew Arnold, *Poetry and Criticism*
> - G. Graff and M. Warner, *The Origins of Literary Studies in America*
> - Chris Baldick, *The Social Mission of English Criticism, 1848-1932*, supplemented by photocopied essays from T. S. Eliot, I. A. Richards, F. R. and Q. D. Leavis, Raymond Williams, and Judith Williamson.
> - Jane Gallop, *Around 1981: Academic Feminist Literary Theory*
> - D. Gless and B. H. Smith, *The Politics of Liberal Education [SAQ 89.1]*
> - Plato, *The Republic*
> - Kenneth Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives*
>
> The second set of texts will consist of the readings, assignments, student writings, and narratives of classroom experiences that together compose the ongoing story of the course you are teaching. (2)

By now, we've completed two-thirds of the semester; the members of our seminar have read and discussed all the texts except Plato and Burke and they've recently turned in their second short paper. The writing assignment for the second paper focused specifically on the relationship between their teaching and the disciplinary and institutional histories they'd read. Here's how we framed the work we asked for:

> Our readings and discussions of Arnold, Baldick, the figures in Graff & Warner, Eliot, Richards, the Leavises, Williams, Williamson, and Gallop have presented several perspectives on what Baldick's title calls the "Social Mission" of English Studies and English teachers. Their several projects and arguments for legitimating the study of English or "practical criticism" or "philology" or "feminism" or any of several nominations for the kinds of pedagogy, literary study, research, or criticism might remind us of our own position in an institu-

> tion. As Jane Gallop remarks, "Much talk about institutionalization implicitly construes institutions as monolithic, unchanging, or even inherently evil. Institutions have histories, are in history. When we conceive of them as unchanging, we have less chance of wittingly affecting their direction. Around 1987, Meaghan Morris wrote: 'Institutionalization is not another name for doom, that fate always worse than death. It's an opportunity, and in many instances a necessary condition, for serious politics'(5)."
>
> . . . Please look back over the seminar work--readings, papers, and discussions--we've completed so far. We'd like you to write a paper for which you find some points of entry among these positions and readings; try to situate yourself and the course you teach in reference to the issues raised by institutional histories and by forms and reforms of "institutionalization." Again, you'll need to reflect about your own and your colleagues' course descriptions and pedagogical goals, reading and writing assignments, and about your stance as a teacher. (1)

I'll quote from three papers I've chosen as samples of the range of positions about teaching and institutional history that have emerged in our seminar. None of these writers' positions should be taken as final; all are tentative excursions into teacherly self-definition.

First, 3rd-year M.F.A. candidate Sherry Kappel, discussing the idea of English Studies having what Chris Baldick calls a "social mission," expresses her skepticism about monolithic political agendas continuing to inform teaching in our discipline:

> From the time of Matthew Arnold on through T. S. Eliot, I. A. Richards, the Leavises and many others, English Studies seems to have had that singular, almost zealous, religious mandate connoted by the word "mission" (as opposed to, even, "missions"). Arnold himself may have summed it up best as the preservation of "the best that's been known and thought in the world." And while "best" can be stated in a multitude of ways--Arnold's Hellenism, Q. D.

Leavis's "Category A" of writers, Eliot's "impersonal" artists through which the past flows; or be an outgrowth of different social stimuli--the Industrial Revolution, the turn of the century, World War I, etc.; what all their definitions share is some sort of transcendental signified which would maintain the traditional Western European, "dead white male" hegemony of old. Even Graff and Warner, whose stated agenda is to demonstrate differences within the field, comment that "academic literary studies were held together . . . by tacit social agreements" (2).

The 1960's changed all that, culminating in a view of criticism spurred largely by "social movement," to borrow a term from Jane Gallop (132). The change, as Graff and Warner point out, is due to a (slight [my word]) shift in the power structure within academia: "It is only as previously excluded groups have entered the university that this earlier consensus has broken down" (2). At the moment, the "previously excluded groups" are, of course, women, minorities, those not privileged by class, homosexuals, and third-world participants. The new consensus is a lack of consensus, encapsulated in "movement" versus "mission." The new difference includes, at the very least, a state of flux, an allowance for evolution and, inevitably, a restructuring of the hegemony--although these don't preclude "mission" from becoming "missions."

Even as a beginning teacher, Kappel's reading of history enables her to locate herself in the midst of this flux, although, as she candidly asks, "At this junction, I must heave a sigh: what is the point of English Studies--that which most of us have devoted the rest of our lives to--or, more succinctly, what's the point of criticism?" I like the independence of her answer, "Each author we've read--Arnold, Eliot, Graff and Warner, Gallop, everyone--make it crystal clear that from their view, at least, the 'point' of it all is some specific political agenda; color me cynical, but I'm not buying it--not in the form of a prepackaged agenda, anyway (Kappel 1-3)." As a teacher who places herself within the movement to restructure the hegemony but

outside any prepackaged agenda, she admirably claims authority for her own interpretation of how institutional history should influence her teaching.

Another member of the seminar focuses his attention on the particular stance he takes in the composition classroom. Chris Yeager, after reflecting about his personal career of graduate study beginning with M.A. studies in literature and now work in poetry writing in Pitt's M.F.A. program, finds in this personal academic history a way to situate his teaching of composition in respect to the institutional histories and to the lack of consensus that Sherry Kappel described:

> Much of what we have read thus far in the . . . seminar has been historical in nature. I have given in this paper some captions from my history. With regard to an English Department, or a writing program, my history has been to resist those histories that might limit what I can do in a classroom. Academically speaking that history has also been to [me] a synthesizer of positions.
>
> As a teacher, I don't want to reproduce myself. I don't want to produce a Marxist, a deconstructionist, a feminist, a Republican, a Christian, an American. I do want to participate in a process in which a student comes to see the value of language and literacy in the way he or she comes to see him/herself, or in the way he/she makes a decision to be, a Marxist, a feminist, a Republican, etc. That is, through work in the academy, I can participate in a process in which learning and making knowledge come to be useful in helping individuals engage in the possible self-definitions they might choose to undertake.
>
> And to do that work in the classroom, I've had to, as best I can, make myself a free agent (without, I hope, becoming a Sartrian tourist). A principled eclectic. As for outside the classroom. . . . (Yeager 8)

I admire his wish to remain independent from the notion of prepackaged institutional agendas even though I'm not sure that all students are equally ready to participate in making themselves

(in Yeager's phrase and, perhaps, image) free agents who can easily choose their self-definitions in and out of the classroom. I also think that his principled eclecticism might lead to a possibly problematic classroom if it would always include any and all kinds of individual self-definition, especially some rather programmatic ones with abhorrent social features that only the A.C.L.U. might insist upon protecting.

In contrast to Yeager's principled eclecticism, M.A. candidate Gail Sullivan suggests a nuanced and differently powerful reading of institutional history. She, like Sherry Kappel, is concerned with negotiating her position regarding "consensus" and "social mission"; she is also seeking a stance for teaching composition that recognizes the conflicts and anxieties emerging from the institutional histories she has read. Her title, "The Institutionalization of 'It,'" suggests her efforts to work out what she represents in the composition classroom and how she participates in a larger enterprise of teachers who share articles of faith about how their work might relate to the creation of social change. Sullivan makes two important moves as she builds a position for herself in the three paragraphs I'll present. First, she attends to the histories:

> The institutional histories presented in this class, particularly Baldick's, have helped me to get a better hold on this idea of the social mission and its relation to the "it" that goes on in my classroom. Baldick's history has helped me to see myself as part of a minority who has inherited a group identity as "critical" readers and writers in relation to a general "social and cultural anxiety" (137). This anxiety, which he traces in Arnold, Eliot, Richards and the Leavises, is in large part, a reaction, or a pushing against, the cultural consequences of modernization; the "diffusion" of ideas, the "stock responses," the "hypnotic receptivity,"--in short, the commercialization of thought (139, 166). One can trace without much difficulty this opposition to consumer culture starting with Arnold's nervous disdain for "machinery" all the way through every major historical critic looked at by Baldick, and continue straight through to Judith Wil-

> liamson's recent discussion of her media classes. However, as is evident in Williamson, the reasoning behind this opposition is different now from what it was then--the attempt of a privileged, but increasingly marginalized social group vying for cultural hegemony, responding, realistically, to a fear of being culturally wiped out by the processes of modernization; though as I write this I'm not so sure that we are so different, even in this respect. At any rate, such figures as Arnold and the Leavises were concerned about "the masses" while we, like Williamson, would say we are concerned for them (in conjunction with our concern for ourselves).

Next, Sullivan turns to the "consensus" she sees between early moderns like Richards and contemporary teachers like Williamson:

> Though I shudder, as I think most people do today, at Richards' comparisons of good reading to "mental health" and of reading teachers to "doctors," I can't help but draw a parallel between his views and Judith Williamson's attempts to cure her students of their blindnesses, as symptoms of ideology (141). Though critics such as Arnold, Richards, and the Leavises were fighting commercial clamps on ideology mainly for the cultural, and hence, literal, survival of their own social group, with little or no investment in aiding disadvantaged groups, there is still a strong "consensus" shared by them and us, an agreement that arises out of a commitment to the work and pleasure of reading. As Baldick mentions in his discussion of the Leavises, their goal was to "extend this small scale intimacy of reader and writer, or student and teacher into a larger consensus embracing an entire literary minority" (174).

I'm particularly taken with Sullivan's focus on "the work and pleasure" of reading and writing and her consequent move, following the Leavises, to extend from the intimacy of reader and writer, student and teacher, the realm of a community of literacy. She is thus able to see what she teaches in General Writing as significantly related to both institutional history and pressing current concerns:

> This idea of "consensus" brings us back to the articles of faith, or "it." For me, this agreement, traceable as far back as Arnold, and of which I am a part, is one of fundamental respect for the work of questioning, and interpreting, the written word as a basis from which to extend and multiply readings of any creature called "text," written or otherwise. And this respect or commitment is one that continues to be distinctly opposed to the "hypnotic receptivity" that is indigenous to our terrain of thought as members of a consumer culture. And it is the teaching of such oppositional stances and movements, in conjunction with a group of texts that forces students to, at least, acknowledge issues of race, class, and gender, among others, that makes social change a possible result of G[eneral] W[riting], without its being specifically defined or prescribed as the goal of the class, but rather, one of many possible results of working on texts as opposed to receiving them. This limited, perhaps nebulous version of the social mission is the one I am most comfortable with. (Sullivan 3-5)

These three texts from our current seminar represent teachers in the process of constructing and revising self-conscious positions about teaching composition within the structures of our department and university. Their tentative positions (and twenty others from the same seminar) also reflect diverse readings of institutional history. While they disagree about the nature and relevance of any social mission or the consequences of consensus within English Studies, they all productively reflect their awareness of the historical and contemporary issues that contextualize their teaching. One of the most profound changes in graduate education that has come with the legitimation of both composition and cultural studies as sites of advanced work in English Departments is precisely this emphasis on pedagogy, history, and teaching practice. The students in our seminar have done more to study and understand their positions as teachers in one year than I did in my entire graduate career. I believe that this shift in the paradigm of graduate training, as represented by the writing I've shown you today, constitutes one of the most important and progressive aspects of a cultural studies curriculum in English graduate education.

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